

FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

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Finding: *(i.e., Conclusions reached after investigation and/or evaluation of facts)*

Research shows that humans are responsible for most of the wildland fire acres burned in the Lake Tahoe basin.¹ Reducing human ignitions of fires is a critical strategy for reducing wildfire losses in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Other jurisdictions have initiated such fire prevention programs that have proven quite effective.²

Background and Supporting Evidence: *(A short statement justifying the Finding and describing desired outcome(s); usually no more than half a page.)*

Fires ignited by humans pose a significant risk to life and property because the highest ignition rates (ignitions per 1,000 acres) in the Tahoe Basin are in the wildland urban interface. Further, fires lit by humans are more likely to escape and become large fires than those caused by lightning. In 2000, scientists predicted that the highest probability of a large fire in the Tahoe Basin was one lit by humans, near lake level, during a drought. These were exactly the conditions that caused the Angora Fire.

In 2000, the Boise National Forest, the Lower Snake River District BLM and the Idaho Department of lands established a fire prevention program that reduced the monthly number human-caused fires to 30% of the level that existed before the program.³ This program consisted of:

- Restricting campfires and smoking

¹ Manley, P.N., J.A. Fites-Kaufman, M.G. Barbour, M.D. Schlesinger, and D.M. Rizzo. Biological Integrity. In: Murphy, Dennis D.; Knopp, Christopher M., technical editors. 2000. Lake Tahoe Watershed Assessment: Volume I. Gen. Tech. Rep. PSW-GTR-175. Albany, CA: Pacific Southwest Research Station, Forest Service, US Department of Agriculture; P 403 – 598.

² For example, see Oregon Department of Forestry, Fire Prevention Working Group. September 2004. White Paper with Recommendations for Reducing Human Caused Fires And Making Everyone Aware of Their Responsibility For Wildfire Prevention.

³ Southwest Idaho Wildfire Prevention and Education Team. October, 2000.

Downloaded from <http://www.nwcg.gov/> on January 30, 2008.

- Limiting the hours of equipment operation and off-road vehicle travel.
- Rescinding private permits for cutting firewood.
- Requiring 1-hour of site patrol after equipment operation.
- Mobilizing a fire prevention and education campaign directed at the general public, off-road vehicle users, campers, and homeowners.

Recommendation(s) *(Based upon an analysis of the Finding, the following recommendation(s) should be made to the Governors):*

The following recommendations are adapted from the successful model of the Southwest Idaho Wildfire Prevention and Education Team:

1) Establish a Fire Prevention Program

The Forest Service will create a permanent position for a Fire Prevention Specialist on the LTBMU. This position will be fully supported. The duties of this position will be to:

- Develop the fire prevention program
- Implement the fire prevention program. Implementation will include developing and signing Memoranda of Understanding between the US Forest Service, the State of California, the State of Nevada, and all the Fire Districts.
- The fire prevention program will include developing and implementing a fire restriction policy
- The fire prevention program will also include developing and implementing a fire prevention outreach and education program.
- The program will also evaluate and improve the fire prevention program on at least an annual basis.

2) Develop and implement a fire restriction policy and implementation plan.

Establish a fire restriction policy during summer and fall months in the Tahoe Basin. This will include both implementation and enforcement of the policy. To avoid confusing the public, this policy will be consistent across all public ownerships in the Tahoe Basin.

By June 1, 2008, implement a minimum fire restriction policy that bans:⁴

- Building, maintaining, attending or using a fire, charcoal fire, campfire, or stove fire, except within the stoves and fire rings provided in developed recreation sites
- Smoking, except within an enclosed vehicle or building, within developed recreation sites, or while stopped in an area at least three feet in diameter that is barren or cleared of all flammable material.

⁴ The following language is taken from Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Order No. 19-07-01, Fire Restrictions, effective June 29, 2007 pursuant to 36 CRF 261.(a) and (b).

By June 1, 2009, implement a comprehensive fire restriction policy that addresses other activities depending on weather conditions. Those activities will include, at a minimum, debris burning, fireworks and other pyrotechnic devices, welding or other torches with an open flame, explosives, equipment operation, off-road vehicles and firewood cutting. The fire restriction plan should include a timeline for moving into and out of different stages of restrictions as determined by weather conditions. The implementation plan will clearly identify who is responsible for enforcing fire restrictions, when and where. It will also include a notification checklist that identifies one person responsible for notifying all appropriate parties.

3) Develop a fire prevention and education program.

The Fire Prevention Specialist will develop and implement an outreach and education program that covers both fire restrictions and fire prevention. The program may include delivering information door-to-door, holding well-publicized community meetings, incorporating fire prevention messages into school programs, airing public service announcements, and enlisting local opinion leaders to promote fire prevention messages. It will address general audiences, as well as provide specific outreach to:

- People who own homes in the wildland-urban interface
- Latino populations, because of the specific challenges of communicating with Spanish-speaking people
- Special user groups, such as off-road vehicle users.

The timeline for implementing the education program will be:

- By June 1, 2008 develop a plan for outreach about restrictions concerning campfires and smoking. This plan will be implemented during the summer and fall of 2008.
- By June 1, 2009, develop a comprehensive outreach and education plan regarding all activities and policies. This plan will be implemented starting in June 2009 and evaluated and updated on an annual basis thereafter.

Impacts of Implementation: *(The implementation of any Recommendation is likely to have specific impacts. Consider potential consequences related to each of the following areas):*

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is REQUIRED (Best Estimate):

☐ Cost

The savings in fire suppression costs and losses due to fire will more than cover the cost of this program.

☐ Funding source

- ☐ Staffing
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is OPTIONAL:

- ☐ Operational
- ☐ Social
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Policy
- ☐ Health and Safety
- ☐ Environmental
- ☐ Interagency